"Zersetzung"

"**Decomposition**" was a method of covertly combating individuals and groups deemed "hostile" by the Ministry for State Security (MfS).

According to the relevant 1976 directive on handling operational matters, **the aim of decomposition was to**

- fragment,
- **paralyze**, and
- disorganize opposing forces,
- **isolating** them from each other and from the outside world.

"Hostile" actions were thus to be

- prevented,
- restricted, or
- **suppressed as a preventative measure**.

The targets of the subversion were mostly independent

- **peace**,
- environmental and
- **human rights groups**,
- **applicants for exit** visas,
- **active Christians**, and
- persons and organizations in the operational area whom the MfS suspected of political underground activity against the GDR.

According to Directive 1/76, **measures aimed at undermining individuals included**, for example, the

- "**systematic discrediting** of public reputation, standing and prestige on the basis of interconnected
  - true, verifiable discrediting information as well as
  - untrue, credible, irrefutable and therefore also discrediting information" or
- the "**systematic organization of professional and social failures to undermine self-confidence**".

Within groups, the Stasi
- attempted to sow
  - **distrust**,
  - envy,
  - **rivalries**, and
  - mutual **suspicion**, and,
- in cooperation with other state agencies, to paralyze them through
  - **job restrictions**,
  - **professional bans**,
  - conscription (compulsory enrollment in armed forces), or
  - forced denaturalization.
  - This subversion often achieved its effectiveness through the **combined use of various measures in a protracted operation**.

The subversion, described by Jürgen Fuchs as "**silent terror**,"
- was considered by the directive to be
  - a "relatively independent way of concluding operational processes" and thus
  - **served as a substitute for law enforcement measures**,
    - which in the Honecker era were often no longer politically expedient, particularly when combating opposition members, **for reasons of international reputation**.

Before implementing measures of subversion,
- corresponding **plans had to be drawn up in detail** and
- **confirmed by the head** of the respective HA,
- independent department or BV, or
- in the case of organizations, groups or **prominent individuals**, **by the minister or his responsible deputy**.

https://www.stasi-mediathek.de/medien/spezifische-zersetzungsmassnahmen-gegen-staatsfeindliche-gruppen/blatt/18/